

Using Quality Improvement Methods to Enhance Recruitment:

The National Children's Study in Ramsey County, Minnesota

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Introduction: Participant recruitment is a critical factor in any longitudinal study. Identifying the most effective toolkit of approaches, tailored to the target population, is key to optimizing response.

Methods: Quality improvement principles guided testing recruitment methods to be refined for the Main Study. Our objective was to identify factors that increase response rates for Ramsey County. Study mailings were sent approximately weekly to a random sample of over 30,000 dwelling units across the county; beginning with Low Intensity (LoI) segments. Two adjacent LoI segments were selected for every one HiI segment.

Data collection mode. The original contact procedures (Timepoint 1) included an advance letter mailed to the dwelling unit in Low Intensity segments, followed by an invitation letter. Residents were instructed to call a toll-free number to participate. At Timepoint 2, mailings began to High Intensity (HiI) Segments. New at Timepoint #3, a mailed Pregnancy Screener was included, providing a second response mode.

Incentives. After all dwelling units were sent advance and invitation letters, mailings began for non-responders. At Timepoint 4, no incentives were offered; while at Timepoint 5, we plan to offer a \$10 gift card incentive.

Results: Initial response rates varied from 1% to 15% by segment, with an overall response of 5% for LoI segments, and 9% for HiI segments.

Response more than tripled for the HiI segments after introducing the mail response option. In addition, when offered the option to call or respond by mail, less than 1% chose to call the Study Center.

Non-responder mailings that included response options of calling or returning a mailed questionnaire also show a strong effect, nearly at the same level of response to the initial mailing.

Conclusions: Findings suggest multiple response modes and repeat mailings provide key strategies for increasing response. Multivariate analyses of response rates by key county characteristics may provide additional insight into which strategies may prove most effective.